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(54) Improvements in and relating to video game machines.

(57) A video game machine wherein a user plays a card game on payment of money. It is not possible to win money by playing the card game as the return from the machine has a maximum value of the user payment to play the game. In the card game, a number of cards are displayed and a score is given for the combination according to the rules of poker. If a sufficiently good "hand" is achieved the game is continued in the form of a card value game where a user guesses the value of a comparison card displayed face down relative to an initial card displayed face up.

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Improvements in and relating to video game machines

The present invention relates to video games and in particular to those which are played in public places.

It is known to provide a video game machine which is played by a user in the hope of winning money. Generally speaking, little skill is involved in playing the video games and gambling is the essential feature. US Patent Specification No. 4,560,161 (Tagasago) and UK Patent Specification Nos. 2,169,737 (JPM) and 2,169,736 (JPM) describe various video card game machines. Generally speaking, little skill is involved and the machines are played in the hope of winning a prize.

The present invention is directed towards providing a video game machine which provides amusement for a player and which does not involve gambling.

According to the invention, there is provided a game playing method for a video game machine comprising the steps of:-

receiving a user payment of currency or tokens representing currency;
directing the playing of a video game;
dispensing a refund of value up to but not exceeding that of the user payment according to user success at the video game; and
ending the video game.

According to another aspect of the invention, there is provided a video game machine having a visual display unit, a user control panel, reception means for reception of a user payment, and a control unit for directing the playing of a video game and the dispensing of a refund of maximum value up to, but not exceeding that of the user payment according to user success at the video game.

It will be appreciated that because the video game machine of the invention only dispenses a refund, and the maximum value of the refund is less than or equal to the user payment, the machine provides not only amusement for a player but also a target to be aimed at, without gambling being involved. This is an important feature of the invention as heretofore, video game machines have either involved gambling or have not dispensed any return what-so-ever, in which case it is difficult to hold a players interest.

In one embodiment of the invention, the video game includes a combination card game and the step of playing the combination card game comprises the sub-steps of:-

displaying a plurality of playing cards
assigning a score to the displayed cards according to the combination of cards;

cards;

assigning a score to the displayed cards including the drawn card;

repeatedly displaying a drawn card in place of a displayed card a number of times up to a pre-set maximum number of times; and

assigning a score to the displayed cards each time a drawn card is displayed.

Such a combination card game is very interesting and involves both an element of chance and also skill as a user must make decisions with regard to the drawing of cards.

Ideally, a card value game is initiated if a pre-set score is achieved by a user at the combination card game.

This provides an additional incentive to a player to succeed at the combination card game.

In one embodiment, the card value game involves:-

displaying an initial playing card face up;
displaying a comparison playing card face down;
receiving a user guess as to the value of the comparison card relative to the initial card;
ending the game if the guess is wrong or, if the guess is correct, incrementing the user score and initiating another card value game by displaying a further initial card and a comparison card.

Such a card value game involves quite an amount of skill and each time a player plays the card value game he or she is taking the chance that the score which has been assigned will either be lost or will be doubled, thus, there is an additional target to be aimed at, while at the same time, the maximum refund which may be achieved after a number of successful card value games is less than or equal to the user payment.

In one aspect of the invention, the card value game is continued by assigning a score to a set of cards displayed in the card value game according to the combination of cards displayed.

In this way, a bonus score may be achieved, purely on chance as a user cannot determine the cards which are displayed in the card value game.

Preferably, the combination card game, and/or the card value game are played according to the rules of poker.

Poker is a popular game and its rules are generally well known. Accordingly, this arrangement would be convenient generally.

The video game of the invention may alternatively take the form of a quiz game or possibly a game of the fruit machine type. Indeed, it is envisaged that any type of game may be played as long as the maximum return is a refund of value less than or equal to the user payment.

The invention will be more clearly understood from the following description of a preferred embodiment thereof given by way of example only with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:-

Fig. 1 is a block diagram of a video game machine according to the invention;

Fig. 2 is a block diagram illustrating portion of the video game machine in more detail;

Fig. 3 is a flow diagram illustrating the operation of the video game machine;

Fig. 4 is a flow diagram illustrating the operation of the video game machine in more detail; and

Fig. 5 (a) to 5 (c) are illustrations of various video display formats according to the invention.

Referring to the drawings, and initially to Figs. 1 and 2 there is illustrated a video game machine according to the invention, indicated generally by the reference numeral 1. The video game machine 1 comprises a video display 2 a user control panel 3 and a control unit 4. The video game machine 1 also includes a hopper and associated solenoids 5 for reception of currency or token representing currency. Coin meters 6 and indicating lights 7 and a power supply 14 are also provided.

The control unit 4 is illustrated in more detail in Fig. 2 and it comprises a microprocessor 8 having EPROM memory circuits 9 and RAM memory circuits 10 with battery back-up 11. The control unit 4 also includes input ports 12 and output ports 13. A dispenser (not shown) is also provided for dispensing of a refund.

Referring now to Fig. 3 the operation of the video game machine 1 is illustrated. In this embodiment, the machine is programmed to allow the playing of a card game, which is initiated on reception of a user payment indicated in step 20 of Fig. 3. The playing of the card game is indicated at step 21 and the control unit 4 assigns a score according to user success at the game at step 22. If a pre-set score is achieved the machine dispenses a refund of value up to but not greater than the user payment. The game is then ended. Alternatively, if a pre-set score is not achieved the game is ended without payment of a refund. The steps of dispensing a refund and of ending the game are indicated by the numerals 23 and 24, respectively.

It will be appreciated that by directing the playing of a video game in this way, the video game machine of the invention may not be used for gambling and will be played for amusement only. The machine, however, has the advantage over conventional amusement machines in that a refund may be obtained of value up to but not exceeding the user payment.

Referring now to Figs. 4 and 5 the step 21 of playing the card game is illustrated in more detail. In step 21(a) five playing cards are displayed face up (see Fig. 5 (a)). The control unit 4 (at step 21 (b)) then assigns a score to the displayed cards on the basis of the combination of displayed cards according to the rules of poker. This score is illustrated at the top left hand side of the video display. In step 21(c) the machine receives instructions from a user as to whether or not one of the displayed cards is to be replaced with a drawn card. The prompt "raise or draw" for these instructions is displayed at the bottom of the video display. The user may "raise" the stakes before drawing a card. If a draw instruction is received a displayed card is replaced by the drawn card and a score is assigned to the new set of displayed cards. Cards may be drawn up to five times and when this limit is reached or when a player decides not to draw another card the machine compares the score achieved with a pre-set score in step 21-(d). If the score achieved is below the pre-set score the game is ended (step 21(h)). The player then has the opportunity in step 21 (e) to end play or avail of an opportunity to increase his or her score by making a skilled guess the value of a comparison card with respect to an initial card according to the rules of poker. The relevant display is illustrated in Fig 5(b). The inputs are illustrated on the video display 2 as "hi", "lo" or "stand". If a user opts to "stand", he or she retains the displayed score and the game is ended. Alternatively a guess is inputted on the control panel 3 (step 21(f)). The machine determines in step 21(g) if the guess is correct and, if not, the game is ended. If, however, the guess is correct the score achieved by the user in the combination card game is doubled and the card value game may be repeated. The card value game may be repeated each time the user guesses correctly until five cards are displayed face up on the video display 2. When this happens, the five cards are cleared from the display and the fifth card is displayed on the left side of the screen as an initial card for a further card value game. The procedure is then repeated until there is a second set of five cards displayed face up as illustrated in Fig. 5 (c). The user is assigned a score in step 21 (j) if first and/or second set of five playing cards displayed face up forms a desired poker combination. The video game refunds currency or tokens representing currency of a value up to, but not exceeding that of the user payment according to the user score at the end of the game. It will be noted that if a user opts to "stand" at any time i.e. not proceed with another card value game when this is possible, a refund may be obtained of value according to the score achieved at that stage.

Although a card game has been described, it is

envisaged that any type of game may be played, for example, a quiz game or a game of the "fruit machine" type. The important feature is that a player does not receive a prize but instead may obtain a refund of a value up to but not exceeding that of his or her payment. It is envisaged, for example, that if the game is a quiz game statements will be displayed on the video display 2 and the user will be prompted to indicate whether the statement is true or false. A score would be assigned according to the number of correct responses made by a player. Generally, the score would be in the form of a number of points and if a target number of points is achieved a refund may be dispensed.

It is also envisaged that the video game machine 1 may be programmed to direct the playing of a separate non-payment game in which a user is not required to make a payment to initiate the game. Prizes may be awarded depending on user success. In one example, it is envisaged that such a non-payment game would take the form of a quiz game in which a large amount of skill is involved. In such a quiz game, a user would indicate on the control panel 3 that he wishes to play the game and the control unit 4, in turn, directs statements to be displayed on the video display 2. The player must then respond by indicating on the control panel whether or not the statements are correct or incorrect. The video display 2 would then display points awarded according to the number of correct responses made by a player. Each time a correct response is made, this score is incremented. The object of the game is to achieve a pre-set number of points for which prizes are awarded. In this case, the video machine 1 pays out money where the pre-set number of points is achieved.

If more than one game may be played on the video game machine these may be either interconnected or completely separate.

Claims

1. A game playing method for a video game machine comprising the steps of:-
receiving a user payment (20) of currency or tokens representing currency;
directing the playing of a video game (21);
dispensing a refund (23) of value up to but not exceeding that of the user payment according to user success at the video game; and
ending the video game (24).

2. A method as claimed in claim 1 in which the video game includes a combination card game and the step of playing the combination card game comprises the sub-steps of:-
displaying a plurality of playing cards (21a);

assigning a score (21b) to the displayed cards according to the combination of cards;
displaying a drawn card in place of one of the cards (21c);

5 assigning a score (21b) to the displayed cards including the drawn card;
repeatedly displaying (21c) a drawn card in place of a displayed card a number of times up to a pre-set maximum number of times; and
10 assigning a score (21b) to the displayed cards each time a drawn card is displayed.

3. A method as claimed in claim 2 further comprising the steps of initiating and playing a card value game (21f) if a pre-set score is achieved by a user at the combination card game.

4. A method as claimed in claim 3 wherein playing the card value game (21f, 21g) comprises the sub-steps of:-
displaying an initial playing card face up;
20 displaying a comparison playing card face down;
receiving a user guess as to the value of the comparison card relative to the initial card;
ending the game if the guess is wrong or, if the guess is correct, incrementing the user score and initiating another card value game by displaying a further initial card and a comparison card.

5. A method as claimed in claim 4 comprising the further steps of continuing the card value game by assigning a score to a set of cards displayed in the card value game according to the combination of cards displayed.

6. A method as claimed in any of claims 2 to 5 in which the combination card game is played according to the rules of poker.

7. A method as claimed in any of claims 3 to 6 in which the card value game is played according to the rules of poker.

8. A method as claimed in claim 1 in which the video game is a quiz game.

9. A method as claimed in claim 1 in which the video game is of the fruit machine type.

10. A video game machine (1) having a video display unit (2), a user control panel (3), reception means (5) for reception of a user payment and a control unit (4) for directing the playing of a video game and the dispensing of a refund of maximum value up to, but not exceeding that of the user payment according to user success at the video game.

11. A video game machine as claimed in claim 10 in which the video game is a combination card game in which a set of playing cards is displayed (21a) on the video display unit (2) and a score is assigned (21a) to the cards according to the combination of cards; and in which a user may replace a card with a drawn card (21c) up to a maximum pre-set number of times, the machine assigning a score (21c) to each set of cards displayed.

12. A video game machine as claimed in claim 11 in which the machine initiates a card value game (21e, 21f) if a pre-set score is achieved by a user at the combination card game.

13. A video game machine as claimed in claim 12 in which an initial card is displayed face-up and a comparison card is displayed face down and a user guess may be received as to the value of the comparison card relative to the initial card, and in which the game is ended (21h) if the guess is wrong or, if the guess is correct, the user score is incremented and another card value game may be initiated.

14. A video game machine as claimed in claim 12 in which the control unit (4) comprises means for assigning a score (21j) to a set of cards displayed face-up in the card value game.

15. A video game machine as claimed in claim 11 in which the combination card game is played according to the rules of poker.

16. A video game machine as claimed in claim 12 in which the card value game is played according to the rules of poker.

17. A video game machine as claimed in claim 10 in which the video game is a quiz game.

18. A video game machine as claimed in claim 10 in which the video game is of the fruit machine type.

19. A video game machine comprising:-
a video display unit (2); a user control panel (3); acceptance means (15) for accepting currency or tokens representing currency; and a control unit (4) having means for directing the playing of at least two mutually separate and independent video games, including a non-payment game which is initiated without user payment of currency or tokens representing currency and a payment game which is initiated only with user payment of currency or tokens representing currency; and means for judging user success at each game.

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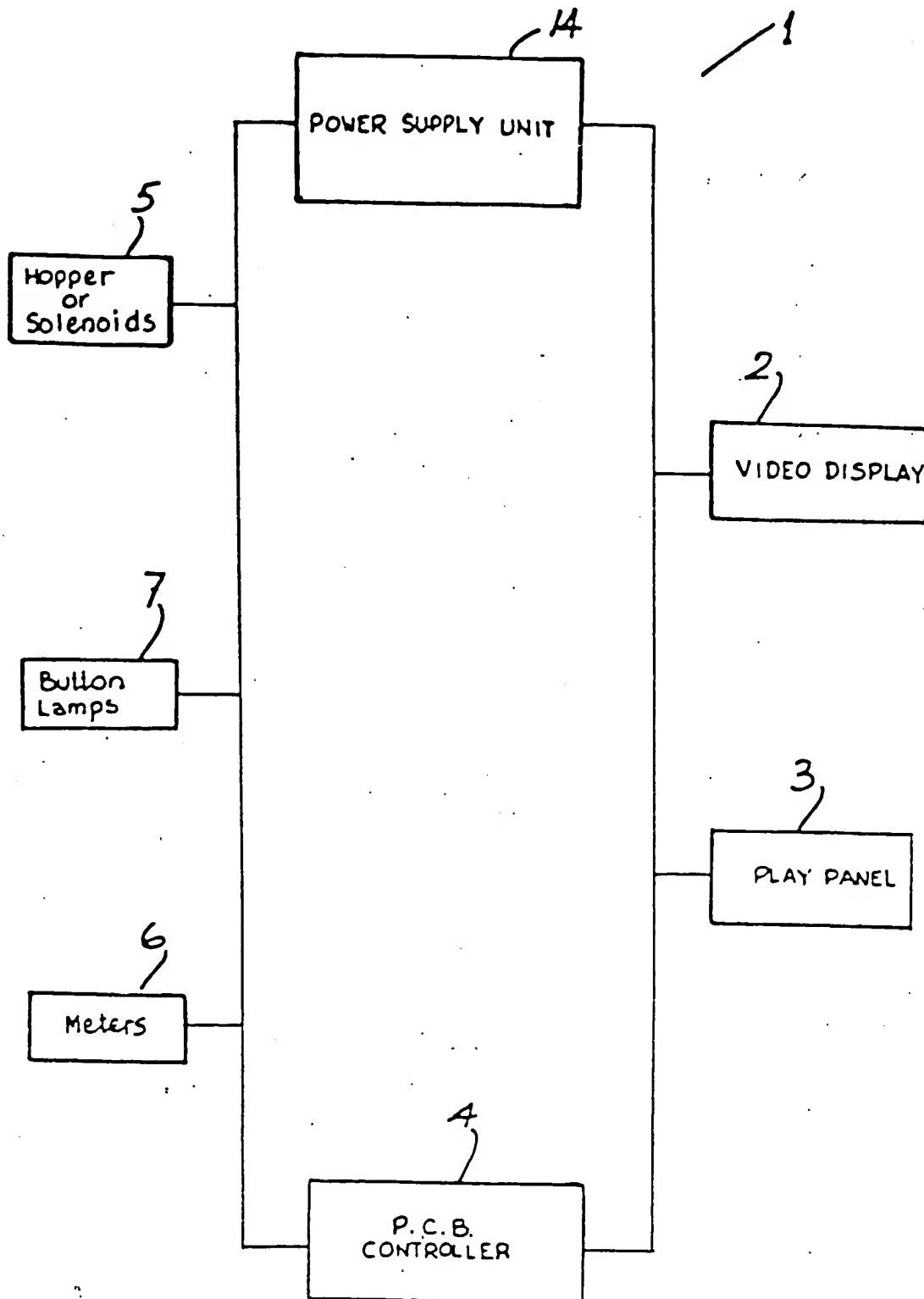


Fig. 1

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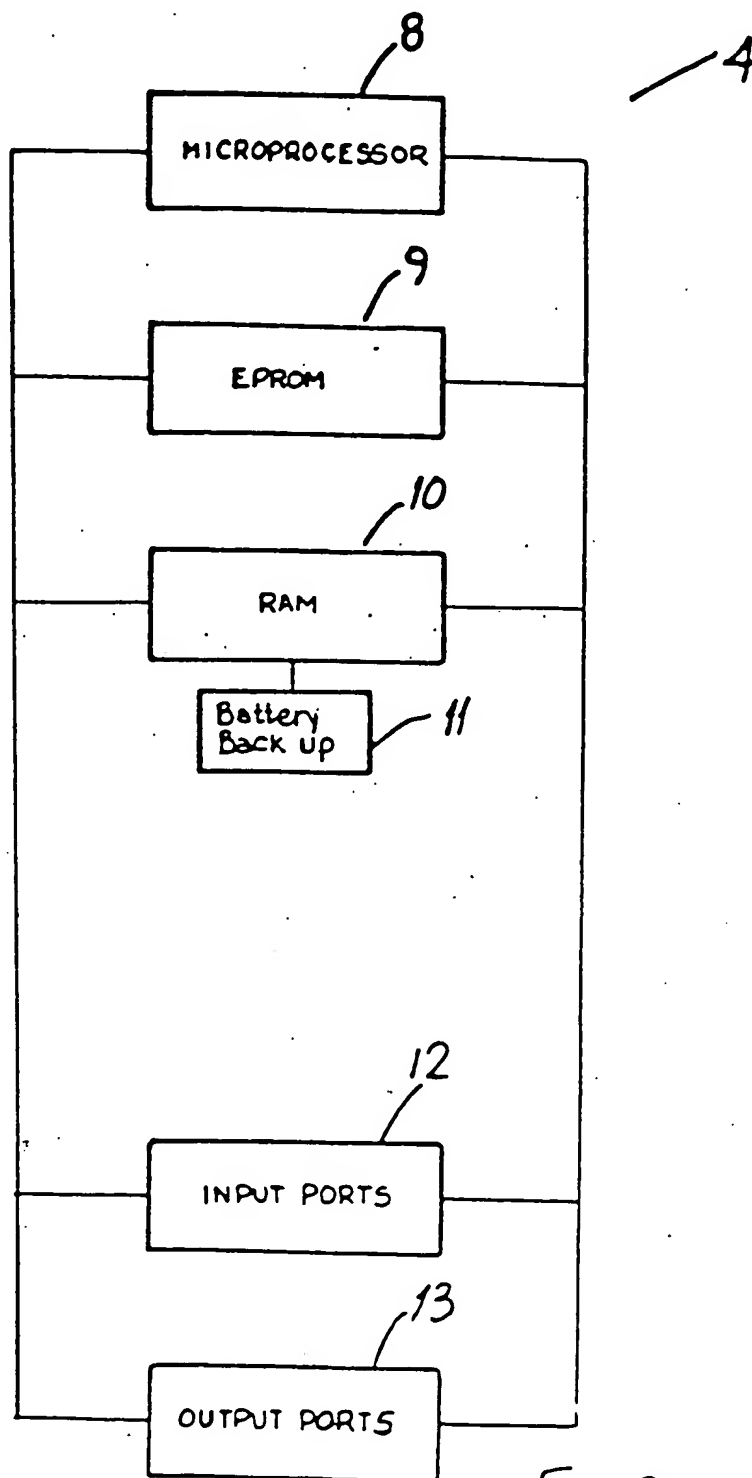


Fig.2

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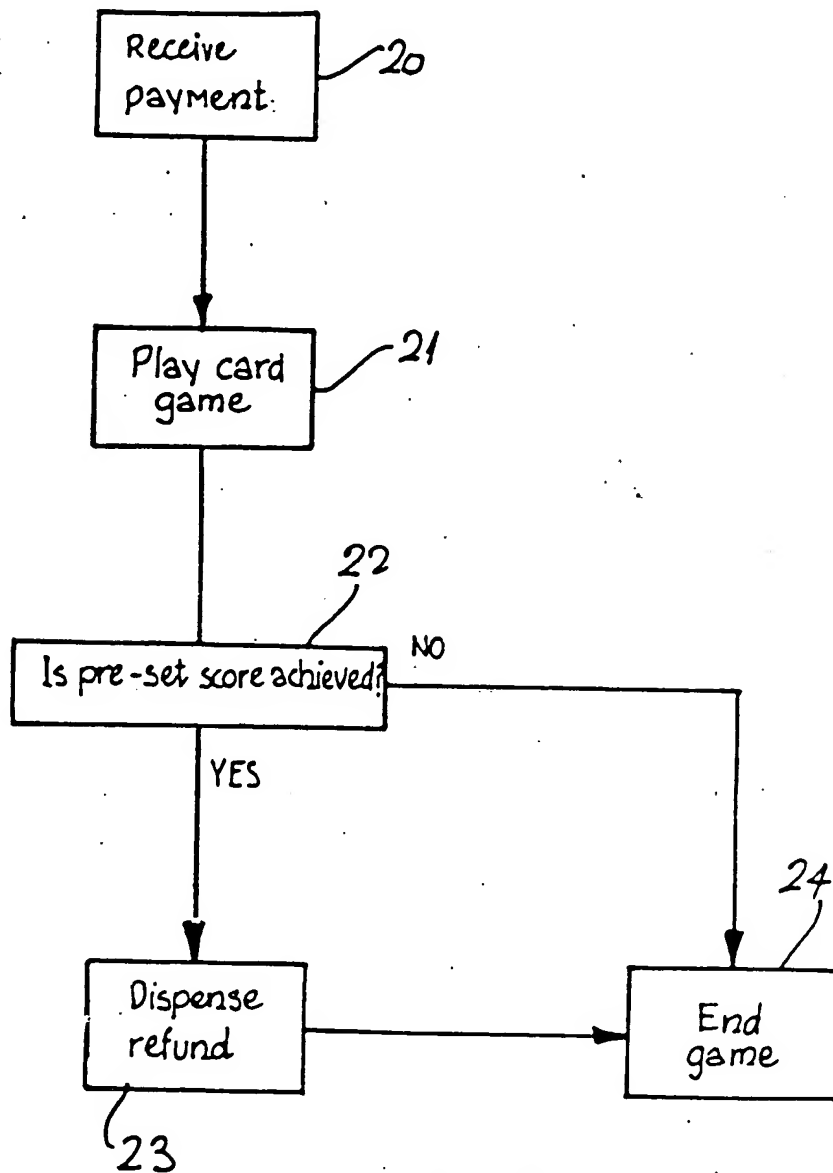


Fig. 3

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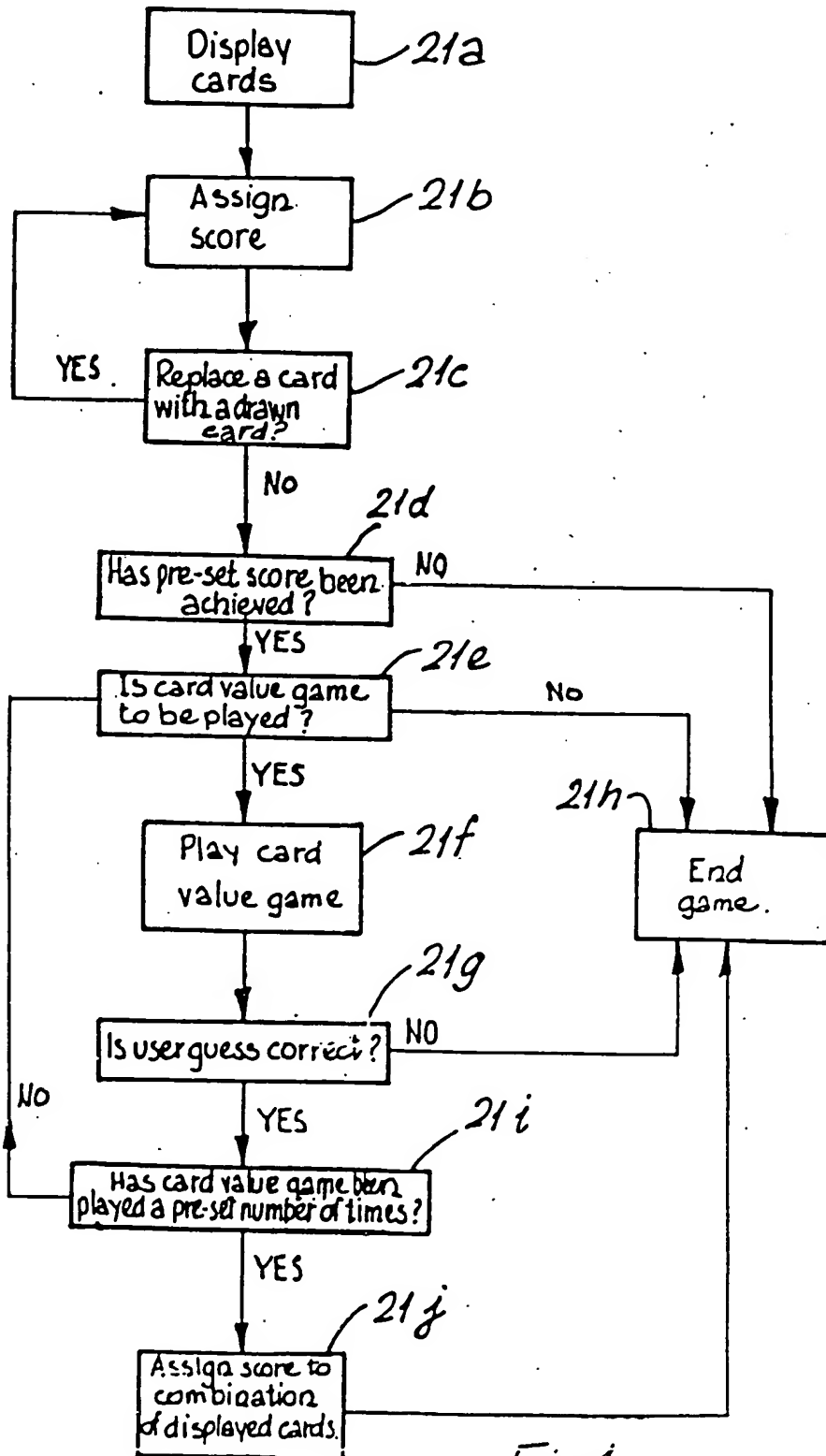


Fig. 4

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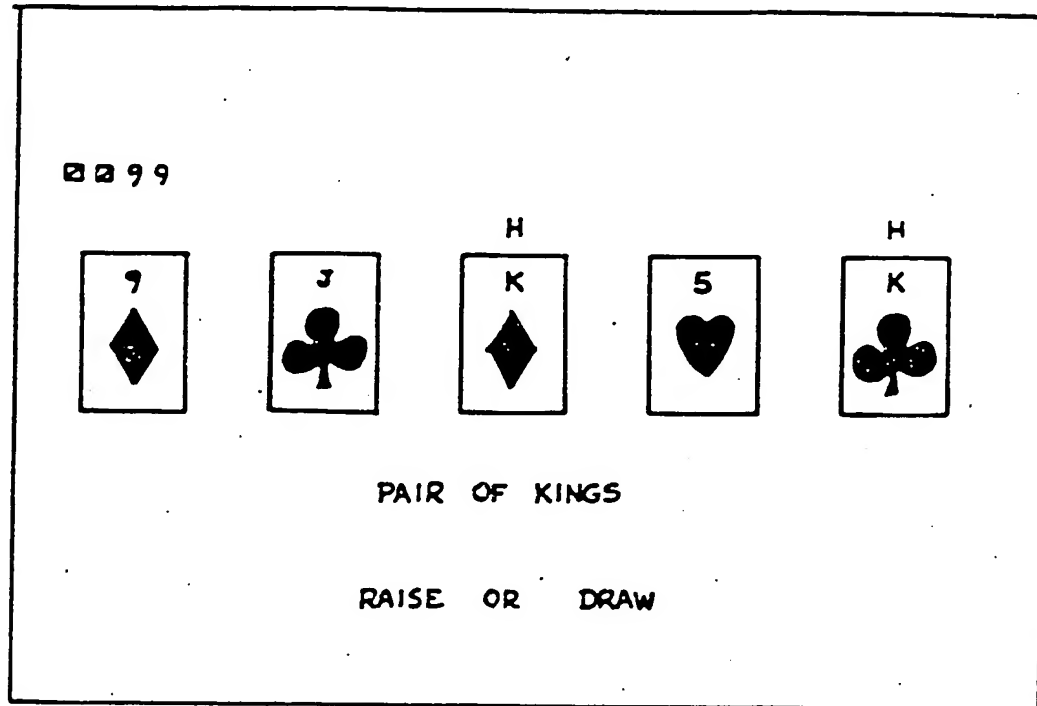


Fig.5a

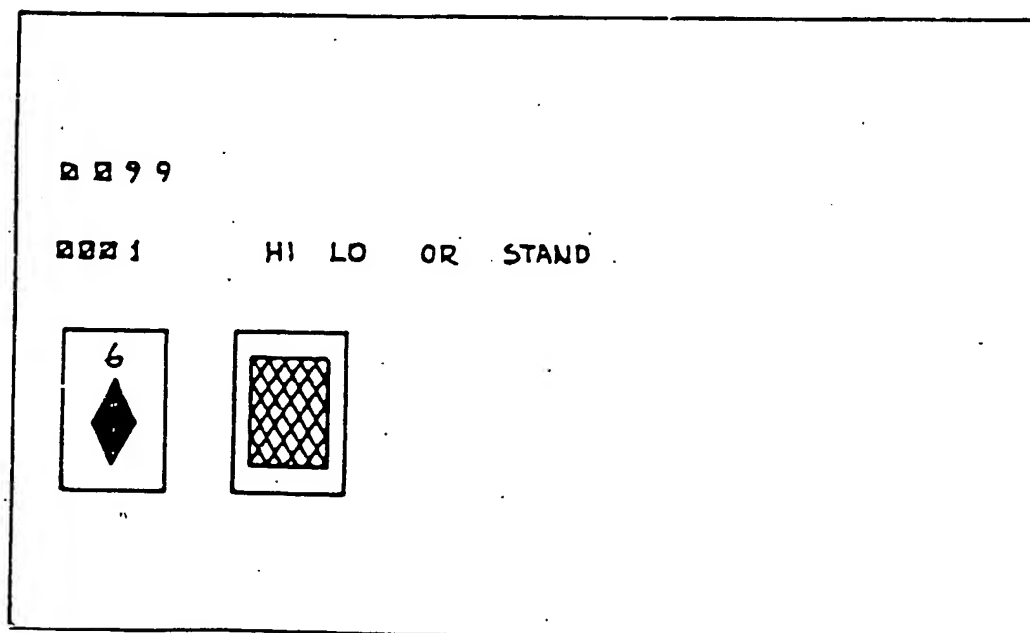


Fig.5b

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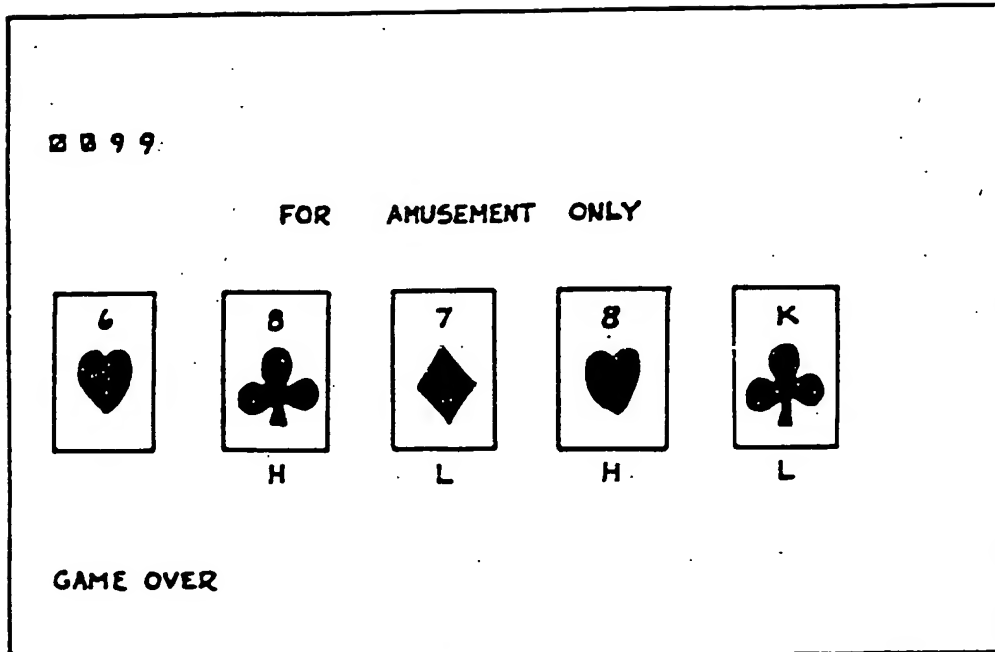


Fig. 5 c.